

page response, switches on a corresponding radio transceiver in that base station, and causes that base station to send a message via the control channel to the called mobile station that instructs the called mobile station to tune to the selected voice or traffic channel. A through-connection for the call is established once the mobile station has tuned to the selected AVC or DTC.

The performance of the system having ACCs that is specified by TIA/EIA/IS-54-B has been improved in a system having digital control channels (DCCs) that is specified in TIA/EIA/IS-136, which is expressly incorporated herein by reference. One example of such a system having DCCs with new formats and processes is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 07/956,640 entitled "Digital Control Channel", which was filed on Oct. 5, 1992, now U.S. Pat. No. 5,404,355 and which is incorporated in this application by reference. Using such DCCs, each TIA/EIA/IS-54-B radio channel can carry DTCs only, DCCs only, or a mixture of both DTCs and DCCs. Within the TIA/EIA/IS-136-B framework, each radio carrier frequency can have up to three full-rate DTCs/DCCs, or six half-rate DTCs/DCCs, or any combination in between, for example, one full-rate and four half-rate DTCs/DCCs.

In general, however, the transmission rate of the DCC need not coincide with the half-rate and full-rate specified in TIA/EIA/IS-54-B, and the length of the DCC slots may not be uniform and may not coincide with the length of the DTC slots. The DCC may be defined on an TIA/EIA/IS-54-B radio channel and may consist, for example, of every n-th slot in the stream of consecutive TDMA slots. In this case, the length of each DCC slot may or may not be equal to 6.67 msec, which is the length of a DTC slot according to TIA/EIA/IS-54-B. Alternatively (and without limitation on other possible alternatives), these DCC slots may be defined in other ways known to one skilled in the art.

In cellular telephone systems, an air link protocol is required in order to allow a mobile station to communicate with the base stations and MSC. The communications link protocol is used to initiate and to receive cellular telephone calls. As described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/477,574 entitled "Layer 2 Protocol for the Random Access Channel and the Access Response Channel," which was filed on Jun. 7, 1995, now U.S. Pat. No. 5,610,917 and which is incorporated in this application by reference, the communications link protocol is commonly referred to within the communications industry as a Layer 2 protocol, and its functionality includes the delimiting, or framing, of Layer 3 messages. These Layer 3 messages may be sent between communicating Layer 3 peer entities residing within mobile stations and cellular switching systems. The physical layer (Layer 1) defines the parameters of the physical communications channel, e.g., radio frequency spacing, modulation characteristics, etc. Layer 2 defines the techniques necessary for the accurate transmission of information within the constraints of the physical channel, e.g., error correction and detection, etc. Layer 3 defines the procedures for reception and processing of information transmitted over the physical channel.

Communications between mobile stations and the cellular switching system (the base stations and the MSC) can be described in general with reference to FIGS. 1 and 2. FIG. 1 schematically illustrates pluralities of Layer 3 messages 11, Layer 2 frames 13, and Layer 1 channel bursts, or time slots, 15. In FIG. 1, each group of channel bursts corresponding to each Layer 3 message may constitute a logical channel, and as described above, the channel bursts for a given Layer 3 message would usually not be consecutive

slots on an TIA/EIA/136 carrier. On the other hand, the channel bursts could be consecutive; as soon as one time slot ends, the next time slot could begin.

Each Layer 1 channel burst 15 contains a complete Layer 2 frame as well as other information such as, for example, error correction information and other overhead information used for Layer 1 operation. Each Layer 2 frame contains at least a portion of a Layer 3 message as well as overhead information used for Layer 2 operation. Although not indicated in FIG. 1, each Layer 3 message would include various information elements that can be considered the payload of the message, a header portion for identifying the respective message's type, and possibly padding.

Each Layer 1 burst and each Layer 2 frame is divided into a plurality of different fields. In particular, a limited-length DATA field in each Layer 2 frame contains the Layer 3 message 11. Since Layer 3 messages have variable lengths depending upon the amount of information contained in the Layer 3 message, a plurality of Layer 2 frames may be needed for transmission of a single Layer 3 message. As a result, a plurality of Layer 1 channel bursts may also be needed to transmit the entire Layer 3 message as there is a one-to-one correspondence between channel bursts and Layer 2 frames.

As noted above, when more than one channel burst is required to send a Layer 3 message, the several bursts are not usually consecutive bursts on the radio channel. Moreover, the several bursts are not even usually successive bursts devoted to the particular logical channel used for carrying the Layer 3 message. Since time is required to receive, process, and react to each received burst, the bursts required for transmission of a Layer 3 message are usually sent in a staggered format, as schematically illustrated in FIG. 2(a) and as described above in connection with the TIA/EIA/IS-136 standard.

FIG. 2(a) shows a general example of a forward (or downlink) DCC configured as a succession of time slots 1, 2, . . . , N, . . . included in the consecutive time slots 1, 2, . . . sent on a carrier frequency. These DCC slots may be defined on a radio channel such as that specified by TIA/EIA/IS-136, and may consist, as seen in FIG. 2(a) for example, of every n-th slot in a series of consecutive slots. Each DCC slot has a duration that may or may not be 6.67 msec, which is the length of a DTC slot according to the TIA/EIA/IS-136 standard.

As shown in FIG. 2(a), the DCC slots may be organized into superframes (SF), and each superframe includes a number of logical channels that carry different kinds of information. One or more DCC slots may be allocated to each logical channel in the superframe. The exemplary downlink superframe in FIG. 2(a) includes three logical channels: a broadcast control channel (BCCH) including six successive slots for overhead messages; a paging channel (PCH) including one slot for paging messages; and an access response channel (ARCH) including one slot for channel assignment and other messages. The remaining time slots in the exemplary superframe of FIG. 2 may be dedicated to other logical channels, such as additional paging channels PCH or other channels. Since the number of mobile stations is usually much greater than the number of slots in the superframe, each paging slot is used for paging several mobile stations that share some unique characteristic, e.g., the last digit of the MIN.

FIG. 2(b) illustrates a preferred information format for the slots of a forward DCC. FIG. 2(b) indicates the number of bits in each field above that field. The bits sent in the SYNC